

BIDEN-HARRIS TRANSITION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Thanksgiving Address as Prepared for Delivery by President-elect Joe Biden in Wilmington, Delaware

My fellow Americans:

Thanksgiving is a special time in America. A time to reflect on what the year has brought, and to think about what lies ahead.

The first national day of Thanksgiving, authorized by the Continental Congress, took place on December 18th, 1777. It was celebrated by General George Washington and his troops at Gulph Mills on the way to Valley Forge. It took place under harsh conditions and deprivations — lacking food, clothing, shelter. They were preparing to ride out a long hard winter.

Today, you can find a plaque in Gulph Mills marking that moment.

It reads in part — “This Thanksgiving in spite of the suffering—showed the reverence and character that was forging the soul of a nation.”

Forging the soul of a nation.

Faith, courage, sacrifice, service to country, service to each other, and gratitude even in the face of suffering, have long been part of what Thanksgiving means in America.

Looking back over our history you’ll see that it’s been in the most difficult of circumstances that the soul of our nation has been forged.

Now, we find ourselves again facing a long, hard winter.

We have fought a nearly year-long battle with a virus in this nation.

It’s brought us pain and loss and frustration, and it has cost so many lives.

260,000 Americans — and counting.

It has divided us. Angered us. And set us against one another.

I know the country has grown weary of the fight.

But we need to remember we're at a war with a virus — not with each other.

This is the moment where we need to steel our spines, redouble our efforts, and recommit ourselves to the fight.

Let's remember — we are all in this together.

For so many of us, it's hard to hear that this fight isn't over, that we still have months of this battle ahead of us.

And for those who have lost loved ones, I know this time of year is especially difficult.

Believe me, I know. I remember that first Thanksgiving.

The empty chair, the silence. It takes your breath away.

It's hard to care. It's hard to give thanks. It's hard to look forward.

And it's so hard to hope.

I understand.

I will be thinking and praying for each and every one of you at our Thanksgiving table because we've been there.

This year, we're asking Americans to forego many of the traditions that have long made this holiday such a special one.

For our family, we've had a 40 plus year tradition of traveling over Thanksgiving, a tradition we've kept every year save one — the year after our son Beau died.

But this year, we'll be staying home.

We have always had big family gatherings at Thanksgiving. Kids, grandkids, aunts, uncles, and more.

For the Bidens, the days around Thanksgiving have always been a time to remember all we had to be grateful for, and a time to welcome the Christmas Season.

But this year, because we care so much for each other, we're going to be having separate Thanksgivings.

For Jill and I, we'll be at home in Delaware with our daughter and son-in-law.

So, I know. I know how hard it is to forego family traditions, but it is so very important.

Our country is in the middle of a dramatic spike in cases. We're now averaging over 160,000 new cases a day. And no one will be surprised if we hit 200,000 cases in a single day.

Many local health systems are at risk of being overwhelmed.

That is the plain and simple truth, and I believe you deserve to always hear the truth from your president.

We have to try to slow the growth of the virus. We owe that to the doctors, the nurses, and the other front-line health care workers who have risked so much and heroically battled this virus for so long.

We owe that to our fellow citizens who will need access to hospital beds and the care to fight this disease.

And we owe it to one another — it's our patriotic duty as Americans.

That means wearing masks, keeping social distancing, and limiting the size of any groups we're in. Until we have a vaccine, these are our most effective tools to combat the virus.

Starting on Day One of my presidency, we will take steps that will change the course of the disease.

More testing will find people with cases and get them away from other people, slowing the number of infections. More protective gear for businesses and schools will do the same — reducing the number of cases. Clear guidance will get more businesses and more schools open.

We all have a role to play in beating this crisis. The federal government has vast powers to combat this virus.

And I commit to you I will use all those powers to lead a national coordinated response.

But the federal government can't do it alone. Each of us has a responsibility in our own lives to do what we can to slow the virus.

Every decision we make matters. Every decision we make can save a life.

None of these steps we're asking people to take are political statements.

Every one of them is based in science.

The good news is, that there has been significant, record-breaking progress made recently in developing a vaccine. Several of these vaccines look to be extraordinarily effective.

And it appears that we are on track for the first immunizations to begin by late December or early January.

Then, we will need to put in place a distribution plan to get the entire country immunized as soon as possible, which we will do.

But it's going to take time.

I'm hoping the news of a vaccine will serve as an incentive to every American to take these simple steps to get control of this virus.

There is real hope, tangible hope. So hang on. Don't let yourself surrender to the fatigue.

I know we can and we will beat this virus. America is not going to lose this war.

You will get your lives back. Life is going to return to normal. That will happen. This will not last forever.

So yes, this has been a hard year, but I still believe we have much to be thankful for.

Much to hope for. Much to build upon. Much to dream of.

Here's the America I see, and I believe it's the America you see, too:

An America that faces facts. An America that overcomes challenges. An America where we seek justice and equality for all people.

An America that holds fast to the conviction that out of pain comes possibility; out of frustration, progress; out of division, unity.

In our finest hours, that's who we've always been, and it's who we shall be again, for I believe that this grim season of division and demonization will give way to a year of light and unity.

Why do I think so?

Because America is a nation not of adversaries, but of neighbors.

Not of limitation, but of possibility.

Not of dreams deferred, but of dreams realized.

I've said it many times: This is a great country and we are a good people.

This is the United States of America.

And there has never been anything we haven't been able to do when we've done it together.

Think of what we've come through: centuries of human enslavement; a cataclysmic Civil War; the exclusion of women from the ballot box; World Wars; Jim Crow; a long twilight struggle against Soviet tyranny that could have ended not with the fall of the Berlin Wall, but in nuclear Armageddon.

I'm not naïve. I know that history is just that: history.

But to know what's come before can help arm us against despair.

Knowing the previous generations got through the same universal human challenges that we face: the tension between selfishness and generosity, between fear and hope, between division and unity.

And what was it that brought the reality of America into closer alignment with its promise of equality, justice, and prosperity?

It was love. Plain and simple.

Love of country and love for one another.

We don't talk much about love in our politics. The public arena is too loud, too angry, too heated.

To love our neighbors as ourselves is a radical act, yet it's what we're called to do. And we must try, for only in trying, only in listening, only in seeing ourselves as bound together in what Dr. King called a "mutual garment of destiny" can we rise above our divisions and truly heal.

America has never been perfect. But we've always tried to fulfill the aspiration of the Declaration of Independence: that all people are created equal, created in the image of God. And we have always sought "to form that more perfect union."

What should we give thanks for in this season?

First, let us be thankful for democracy itself. In this election year, we have seen record numbers of Americans exercise their most sacred right — that of the vote — to register their will at the ballot box.

Think about that. In the middle of a pandemic, more people voted this year than have ever voted in the history of America.

Over 150 million people cast a ballot. That is simply extraordinary.

If you want to know what beats deep in the heart of America, it's this: democracy.

The right to determine our lives, our government, our leaders. The right to be heard.

Our democracy was tested this year. And what we learned is this: The people of this nation are up to the task.

In America, we have full and fair and free elections, and then we honor the results. The people of this nation and the laws of the land won't stand for anything else.

Through the vote — the noblest instrument of nonviolent protest ever conceived — we are reminded anew that progress is possible.

That “We the People” have the power to change what Jefferson called “the course of human events.”

That with our hearts and hands and voices, today can be better than yesterday, and tomorrow can be better still.

We should be thankful, too, that America is a covenant and an unfolding story.

We have what we need to create prosperity, opportunity and justice: Americans have grit and generosity, a capacity for greatness and reservoirs of goodness.

We have what it takes. Now we must act.

And this is our moment — ours together — to write a newer, bolder, more compassionate chapter in the life of our nation.

The work ahead will not be easy. And it will not be quick.

You want solutions, not shouting.

Reason, not hyper-partisanship.

Light, not heat.

You want us to hear one another again, see one another again, respect one another again.

You want us — Democrats and Republicans and Independents — to come together and work together.

And that, my friends, is what I am determined to do.

Americans dream big.

And, as hard as it may seem this Thanksgiving, we are going to dream big again.

Our future is bright.

In fact, I have never been more optimistic about the future of America than I am right now.

I believe the 21st Century is going to be an American Century.

We are going to build an economy that leads the world.

We are going to lead the world by the power of our example — not the example of our power.

We are going to lead the world on climate and save the planet.

We are going to find cures for cancer and Alzheimer's and diabetes.

And we are going to finally root out systemic racism in our country.

On this Thanksgiving, and in anticipation of all the Thanksgivings to come, let us dream again. Let us commit ourselves to thinking not only of ourselves but of others.

For if we care for one another — if we open our arms rather than brandish our fists — we can, with God's help, heal.

And if we do, and I am sure we can, we can proclaim with the Psalmist who wrote: "The Lord is my strength and my shield ... and with my song I give thanks to him."

And I give thanks now: for you and for the trust you have placed in me.

Together, we will lift our voices in the coming months and years, and our song shall be of lives saved, breaches repaired, and a nation made whole.

From the Biden family to yours, wherever and however you may be celebrating, we wish you a Happy Thanksgiving.

God bless you, and may God protect our troops.
